

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Congressman Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Congressman Elijah Cummings (D-MD) announced that the House of Representatives passed the FY 2006 Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia Appropriations Conference Report, which includes \$800,000 in federal funds to support the Center for Aquatic Life and Conservation, a new initiative of Baltimore's National Aquarium.

"The National Aquarium in Baltimore is among Maryland's most important public institutions and tourist attractions," Hoyer said. "Since 1981, the Aquarium has been a symbol of urban renewal, an economic anchor for the entire state, and a source of pride for all Marylanders. The Center for Aquatic Life and Conservation will enable the Aquarium to carry out its mission in exciting new ways."

"The National Aquarium is a treasure for our region and this funding will enable it to build a new Center for Aquatic Life and Conservation along the Middle Branch," Cardin said. "The location has been a brownfield site and the clean up and development of this site shows Maryland's commitment to improving the environment and to providing students across the region with a state-of-the-art animal care and conservation education center."

"I am proud to have worked with Congressman Hoyer and the entire Maryland delegation to help secure these funds for the National Aquarium in Baltimore," Cummings said. "The funding will bolster the revitalization of one of the State's premier attractions as well as support its ongoing educational programs that open the wonders of marine life to visitors."

"The federal funds included in the conference report will be used to design and construct an entrance, install sidewalks, construct a waterfront walking and biking trail, erect boardwalks over the restored wetland areas, build a fishing pier for the public, and landscape the adjoining areas with native, Bay-friendly plants," added Hoyer.

"Each year, the Aquarium reaches nearly 200,000 students, teachers and parents through field trips, on-site and traveling programs for schools, and teacher workshops," Hoyer said. "Approximately 1.6 million people visit the Aquarium annually. I am especially excited by the impact the Center will have on future generations of Marylanders."

“The Center for Aquatic Life and Conservation will strengthen the Aquarium’s reputation as a world-renowned authority on coastal restoration, and expand their capacity to further address important issues of ocean health,” concluded Hoyer.

Scheduled to open in 2008, the Center will include a publicly accessible waterfront conservation park planted with grasses and greenery native to Maryland and featuring wetland restoration, nature trails and waterfront piers.

David Pittenger, Executive Director of the National Aquarium in Baltimore stated that, “Congressman Hoyer, Cardin, and Cumming’s success on behalf of the Center for Aquatic Life and Conservation is tremendous. These funds will allow us to move forward with this vital project that will impact the City, State and the Chesapeake Bay region, as well as allow us to more fully participate in aquatic conservation efforts internationally. The public access to the waterfront trail on the Middle Branch will be a key component of how we hope to demonstrate restoration of a former industrial site to a flourishing wetland habitat.”

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